



Photo: Wikipedia/Luca Galuzzi

Arizona, the “Grand Canyon State”, offers lots of sun and favorable renewable-energy policies.

Solar opportunities

Arizona, USA: Arizona is one of five U.S. states that added 50 megawatts of PV capacity in 2010. Governor Jan Brewer sought support for an even greater expansion of photovoltaics in Arizona at a Solar Opportunities luncheon in Shanghai.

We caught up with Arizona’s Governor, Jan Brewer in Shanghai, China, where she had travelled in mid-September to engage with Chinese solar manufacturers and high-tech companies and inform them of the many benefits that Arizona has to offer investors. Arizona is China’s fastest-growing trade partner, and is a prime location for solar companies because of its plentiful sun, favorable renewable-energy policies, low payroll taxes (combined with a large skilled workforce), and various incentives for renewable energy companies. It also offers a rapidly growing installed base of photovoltaic power and is strategically located right next to America’s biggest PV market, California.

During her trip to China, Governor Brewer met with Suntech CEO Shi Zhen-grong. Suntech opened its first U.S. manufacturing plant in Goodyear, Arizona, in October last year, and added a third shift to its plant in May – bringing the total number of employees at its Arizona facility to 107. By the end of this year, the Suntech plant plans to have 150 employees. The plant can now produce up to 15,000 solar panels per month, and production is focused on Suntech’s 280-watt solar panels for commercial and utility-scale electricity generation. All products are backed by a 25-year power output warranty and are compliant for procurement with the American Recovery and Rein-

vestment Act (ARRA) and Buy American Provision.

Arizona tax incentives

Largely to stimulate investment and new jobs, Arizona enacted the Renewable Energy Tax Incentive Program, which went into effect on January 1, 2010. The new law provides up to a ten percent refundable income tax credit, and up to a 75 percent reduction on real and personal property taxes. Arizona also offers very generous tax credits for homeowners wishing to install solar systems. As a result, Arizona has a balanced portfolio of solar power – with just over 50 percent of PV installations being residential. Arizona is one of

only five states to add 50 megawatts (MW) of PV capacity in 2010 (the other states being California, Colorado, Nevada and New Jersey), and if the plans of Arizona's largest utility are any guide, much more expansion lies ahead.

On September 15, Arizona Public Service (APS) announced a Request for Proposal (RFP) from solar developers and installers to construct a 17-MW photovoltaic facility – financed by APS through the company's AZ Sun Program. The AZ Sun Program calls for a total of at least six solar facilities online by 2014 with a combined capacity of 100 MW. And most importantly for Arizona, it will create more than 1,000 Arizona construction jobs.

During the Solar Opportunities luncheon in Shanghai, Governor Brewer singled out the benefits of solar power when it comes to job creation: "It is estimated that the solar industry employs about 15 to 30 people for every megawatt of installed solar capacity," she said. "That is six to eight times more than the traditional energy industry does."

Rudy Vetter, Senior Vice President of the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, which was instrumental in bringing Suntech to Arizona, also highlights both low operational costs and fast execution as key advantages offered by Arizona. He quantifies average savings on the operational side at 25 percent and points to the inverter manufacturer Power One to highlight the speed of execution: "After selecting Phoenix as its North America Renewable Energy headquarters, Power One was able to ship products from its new production line in December 2010 after signing the lease on its Phoenix site in September 2010."

Vetter likes to show a map of Greater Phoenix with its impressive cluster of renewable energy companies surrounding the campus of Arizona State University (ASU), Arizona's leading research center when it comes to solar power. Suntech's new facility in Goodyear is on this map as well as number 63 of 72 companies overall in this cluster. Given this network of renewable energy companies around it, it is only fitting that ASU recently celebrated passing the ten-megawatt mark in solar power generation at its four campuses in Arizona. ♦ Eckhart Gouras

Photo: Governor Jan Brewer



Governor Jan Brewer: "It is estimated that the solar industry employs about 15 to 30 people for every megawatt of installed solar capacity."

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